DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 317 566 TM 014 602

AUTHOR Zyskowski, Gloria; Rincones, Rodolfo
TITLE One Approach to a Formal Evaluation of the Amnesty Program.
PUB DATE Jan 90
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association (Austin, TX, January 25-27, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Civics; Classroom Observation Techniques; Educational Assessment; English (Second Language); *Evaluation Methods; *Federal Programs; Interviews; Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; School Districts; Secondary Education; Surveys; *Undocumented Immigrants
IDENTIFIERS *Amnesty; *Dallas Independent School District TX; Immigration Legislation

ABSTRACT

In November 1986, the United States Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which, in part, mandated a program granting legal status to certain undocumented residents who had been in the country since before January 1, 1982. The program involves a two-step process by which currently undocumented aliens are granted temporary and, then, permanent citizenship status. This paper describes a means of providing formal evaluation of the educational program--associated with the amnesty effort conducted by the Dallas (Texas) Independent School District (DISD)--designed to inform potential amnesty applicants of their rights and responsibilities. The DISD was involved in planning the provision of English language and civics classes to approximately 60,000 amnesty applicants believed to reside in Dallas/Rockwall County. During the first year of amnesty classes, the DISD enrolled about 15,000 amnesty applicants in classes at over 100 sites in the 2-county area. The evaluation effort included interviews with program directors, administrator and teacher surveys, student interviews, and classroom observation in 17 classrooms. Results provide information on the accessibility and availability of programming, staff development, site personnel cooperation, teacher preparedness, teaching methods, and student evaluation of program effectiveness. Two data tables are included. (TJH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED317566

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gloria Zyskowski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ONE APPROACH TO A FORMAL EVALUATION OF THE AMNESTY PROGRAM

By

Gloria Zyskowski, Ph.D.
Rodolfo Rincones, Ph.D.

A paper presented at the
Southwest Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
January 25-27, 1990
Austin, Texas

Dallas Independent School District
Planning, Evaluation, and Testing
3801 Herschel Avenue
Dallas, TX 75219

TM014602

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT: This paper outlines steps followed in conducting a formal evaluation of the amnesty program in the Dallas metropolitan area. Although traditional methods for data collection were used, the program's limited lifespan forced adaptations to the evaluation process, and made substantive programmatic changes impractical to implement.

OVERVIEW OF THE AMNESTY PROGRAM: In November 1986, the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). This new law constituted the most dramatic revision of U.S. immigration policy in over two decades. One feature of the law is legalization (frequently referred to as amnesty) - a program for granting legal status to certain undocumented residents who have been in the United Sates since before January 1, 1982.

This immigration reform legislation has two phases. The first phase consisted of the initial application period, during which approximately 1.7 million amnesty applicants came forward to apply for temporary resident status. This phase lasted one year, from May 5, 1987 to May 4, 1988.

The second phase of the amnesty process is currently underway. During this phase, all applicants who were granted temporary resident status must apply for permanent resident status. Failure to adjust status from temporary to permanent means the applicant once again becomes undocumented, loses legalized status, and is eligible for deportation.

There are requirements that must be met for the application for permanent residence, several of which are of direct concern to education providers. Specifically, the applicant "must demonstrate a minimal understanding of ordinary English and a knowledge and understanding of history and government of the United States;" or, the applicant "must be satisfactorily pursuing a course of study recongized by the Attorney General to achieve these skills." (Legalization: Phase Two Requirements and Guidelines for Courses of Study Recognized by the Attorney General, 1988) Since most amnesty applicants have limited English language ability, they will require the services of instructional insitutions, to either prepare for the examination before an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) examiner or pursue a course of study in lieu of taking an exam.

With the assistance of federal funds made available to states to offset the costs associated with implementing the amnesty program, the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) has been involved from the beginning of the second phase of IRCA with planning for the provision of English language and civics classes to the approximately 60,000 amnesty applicants believed to reside in Dallas/Rockwall County. During the first year of amnesty classes, DISD, with the assistance of three subcontractors, has enrolled approximately 15,000 amnesty applicants in classes offered at over 100 sites throughout the two-county area.

EVALUATION CHALLENGES: It is crucial for DISD to get an evaluation handle on the program at this point, as the number of students enrolling in amnesty classes is expected to increase dramatically during the current year. The problems that can be expected to exist with any new program of this size and complexity that has been set up in a relatively short period of time by congressional mandate need to be addressed before the second wave of students appears.

Part of the challenge faced by an evaluator in this instance is the structure of the amnesty program itself. Given the haste with which the federal legislation was drawn up that created the amnesty program, it is not surprising that several key considerations were overlooked. Perhaps most importantly is the time frame allowed for adjustment to permanent status. Once an amnesty applicant obtains temporary legal status, he or she has to complete a 12-month waiting period before becoming eligible to apply for permanent status. After this 12-month wait, the final and most critical 18-month countdown begins. Before this 18-month period is over, the amnesty applicant must appear for an interview with INS and, at that time, either take a citizenship examination before an INS examiner, present documentation indicating successful completion of an alternate INS-sanctioned citizenship test, or provide evidence of the "satisfactory pursuit" of a recognized course of study in English and U.S. civics.

As was previously mentioned, most amnesty applicants have limited English language ability and are frequently illiterate in their native language as well as in English. It would be very difficult for them to learn enough English and U.S. civics in 18 months for them to be able to pass an INS English-language exam. Therefore, the most reasonable method for adjusting to permanent status is to provide evidence of satisfactory educational pursuit.

When the original IRCA legislation was passed in November 1986, education providers had very little time to prepare a pedagogically sound response to the federal mandate. The first 18-month "window of opportunity" had opened, and the demand for amnesty classes began soon thereafter. In Dallas, the DISD applied for federal assistance through the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to provide services to approximately 60,000 amnesty applicants. However, DISD was not equipped with the staff, space or resources to reach a population of this size in a relatively short period of time, so it subcontracted with three additional service providers in the Dallas/Rockwall County area - the Dallas County Community College District, the Centro de Amistad, and the Center for English Language.

Although the question of program evaluation was "entertained" during the initial planning stages of the amnesty program, it was not an overwhelming priority. To be fair to local and state service providers, little provision was made for evaluation in

the original legislation and even less guidance was offered. This was little comfort to the DISD amnesty evaluators, however, as an evaluation component is a critical element of any program directly or indirectly funded by TEA. Some way would have to be found to provide evidence of effectiveness for the amnesty program as operated by DISD.

The cornerstone of most educational program evaluations is academic achievement - have program participants learned anything? Since amnesty classes are designed to teach basic English and U.S. civics, this would seem to be a logical approach to program evaluation. However, the amnesty program as it is operated in the DISD and its three subcontractors does not collect any achievement data. Tests are rarely given in the classes, and, on the infrequent occasions when students are tested, grades are seldom recorded.

The original legislation states only that students must provide evidence of the "satisfactory pursuit" of a recognized course of study. In order to receive a Certificate of Satisfactory Pursuit from a recognized service provider under the 1986 IRCA legislation, the only requirement is that students complete 40 hours of attendance during one 60-hour course. There is no provision for documenting what goes on during those 40 hours or what impact class attendance has on a student's knowledge of English or U.S. civics; simply showing up for 40 hours will satisfy the requirements for an amnesty applicant to receive a Certificate of Satisfactory Pursuit. Consequently, there is little impetus for quantifying the learning process.

STRATEGIES AND COMPROMISES: Given that it would not be possible to obtain the kinds of quantifiable data that are frequently used by school districts to document the effectiveness of programs they provide, it was necessary to explore alternative strategies for identifying program effects.

A simplistic approach to program evaluation would have to be taken and, given the nontraditional and temporary nature of the amnesty program itself, this is probably the more appropriate path to follow. The very notion of program impact would have to be set aside. Even if a measurable change in knowledge of English and U.S. civics resulted from 40 hours of instruction in amnesty classes, no direct evidence of this is being collected and thus cannot be reported.

More weight would have to be placed on qualitative data. Perhaps positive changes in students' attitudes and opinions toward education and the immigration process are the most that service providers can hope to attain through the amnesty classes. Likewise, teachers in the program might experience attitudinal changes regarding the amnesty process, and such changes could be used as evidence of program effects.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS OF THE INITIAL EVALUATION: The evaluation effort included interviews, surveys, and classroom observations. The amnesty program directors at DISD and its three subcontractors were interviewed and questions were posed related to the program design, curriculum, and instructional materials used in their respective amnesty programs. In addition, all administrators in the amnesty program were surveyed by mail to obtain information about various issues, including their perceptions about the structure and overall quality of the program.

Likewise, all teachers in the amnesty program were surveyed by mail to obtain information about various issues, including their educational background, teaching certificates held, training received, and proficiency in a foreign language.

A stratified random sample of sites was drawn to determine where classroom observations would be made. A basic classroom observation protocol was designed to obtain information about the physical environment, classroom climate, and instructional strategies used by the teacher. The observation instrument was field tested, and indicated changes were made in the instructions accompanying the instrument.

A random sample of students was interviewed to obtain opinions about facilities, textbooks, and teaching methodologies. A basic interview protocol was designed, and 14 interviews were conducted in the students' native language at DISD and subcontractor sites.

Amnesty Program Director Interviews. The design and operation of the amnesty program differed among the DISD and its three subcontractors. Amnesty classes were offered in approximately 75 DISD sites, 25 Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) sites, 15 Centro de Amistad (CdA) sites, and at one site in the Center of English Languages (CEL). The classes were available seven days a week at various times throughout the day at DISD and DCCCD, while classes were available at various times Monday through Friday at CdA and Monday through Saturday at CEL. Amnesty classes offered through DISD were operated on an "open enrollment" basis; that is, students were permitted to enroll in and begin classes at any point during the school year. In DCCCD, CdA, and CEL students could enroll in amnesty classes offered on a semester basis, and their names were put on waiting lists for the next semester if they enrolled more than two weeks after the semester had begun.

Administrator Survey. Surveys were mailed to amnesty administrators asking them to rate specific characteristics of the amnesty program and to indicate their level of satisfaction with each characteristic. The respondents were asked to rate each characteristic on a five-point scale, with 5 indicating "Excellent," 3 indicating "Adequate," and 1 indicating "Poor."

In general, the administrators reported that amnesty program characteristics were adequate, with "staff development" receiving the lowest overall rating (2.9) and "cooperation of site personnel" receiving the highest rating (3.7). The DISD administrators gave the lowest overall ratings to the amnesty program, while the three subcontractors reported approximately the same general level of satisfaction. Only one characteristic, "Direction from/communication with central administration," received a "Poor" rating from one of the subcontractors.

Administrators in the amnesty program were asked to specify three topics that were of greatest concern to them for the next school year. Overall, "staff development" was cited by 44.4% of the administrators, although only 20% of the DISD respondents reported this area to be of concern. Thirty-nine percent of the administrators indicated that they were concerned about "availability of materials," "curriculum guidelines," and "intake procedures," while 11.1% reported that they were concerned about "cooperation of site personnel."

Teacher Surveys. Surveys were sent to all teachers in the program. Table 1 shows the highest degree earned by amnesty teachers by subcontractor. In general, amnesty teachers have either a bachelor's or a master's degree (46.2% and 46.0%, respectively), with the DCCCD having the highest percentage of teachers with master's degrees (55.5%). Twenty-four (6.8%) amnesty teachers reported having either a high school diploma/general education diploma or an associate's degree.

Table 2 presents the number and percent of amnesty teachers by subcontractor holding teaching certificates or endorsements. Overall, 75.8% of amnesty teachers who have valid teaching certificates are certified in elementary education, and 71% of the certified amnesty teachers also hold bilingual or ESL endorsement. Amnesty teachers reported that 33.9% overall were not certified teachers, with DISD having the lowest percentage of non-certified teachers in the amnesty program (18.1%).

Amnesty teachers reported that they had received some type of training (i.e., in-service, previous experience) in areas related to teaching in this program. Almost 89% of all amnesty teachers reported training in ESL, and 48.9% reported training in teaching adult learners. An even smaller number (39.2%) reported previous training in literacy development.

Proficiency in a foreign language was the final characteristic of amnesty teachers that was surveyed. A high percentage of amnesty teachers (93.4%) reported some level of proficiency in Spanish. The next most frequently reported language ability was some level of French proficiency (16.6%). In all, amnesty teachers surveyed indicated some level of proficiency in 20 languages, with those

Table 1

Educational Background of Amnesty Teachers by Subcontractor

Subcontractor		Highest Degree Earned[a]				
		HS/GED	A	B	M	Ph.D.
DISD						
	Number	11	1	107	101	7
	Percent	4.8	0.4	47.1	44.5	3.1
DCCCD						
	Number	1	3	36	55	4
	Percent	1.0	3.0	36.4	55.5	4.0
CdA						
	Number	4	3	11	5	1
	Percent	16.7	12.5	45.8	20.8	4.2
CEL						
	Number	1	0	10	4	0
	Percent	6.7	-	66.7	26.7	-
Total						
	Number	17	7	164	165	12
	Percent	4.8	2.0	46.0	46.2	3.4

Note: DISD=Dallas Independent School District; DCCCD=Dallas County Community College District; CdA=Centro de Amistad; CEL=Center of English Language.

[a]A = Associates; B = Bachelors; M = Masters

Table 2

Certificates or Endorsements Held by Amnesty Teachers by Subcontractor

Subcontractor		Certificates Held					No Certificate Held
		Elem.	Sec.	Bil.	ESL	Other	
DISD							
	Number	158	59	72	71	57	41
	Percent*	83.2	31.1	38.0	37.4	30.0	18.1
DCCCD							
	Number	21	23	12	17	15	55
	Percent	43.7	47.9	25.0	35.4	31.3	56.7
CdA							
	Number	5	3	1	3	0	19
	Percent	83.3	50.0	16.6	50.0	-	79.2
CEL							
	Number	7	2	1	2	1	8
	Percent	87.5	25.0	12.5	25.0	12.5	53.3
Total							
	Number	191	87	86	93	73	123
	Percent	75.8	34.5	34.1	36.9	29.0	33.9

Note: DISD=Dallas Independent School District; DCCCD=Dallas County Community College District; CdA=Centro de Amistad; CEL=Center of English Language.

*Numbers will total more than 100% due to multiple responses.

employed by the DCCCD reporting the greatest diversity in languages represented (n=17).

Student Interviews. Results of the student interviews indicated that the majority of students had very favorable impressions of different aspects of the program. All of the students interviewed were satisfied with both their classes and facilities where classes were held. When students were asked if they felt they were learning new things, 86% of them indicated that they have improved their English, while 79% said they have learned about U.S. history and civics. Seventy-nine percent of the students noted that taking amnesty classes will make them feel more confident during their INS interview.

All of the students interviewed expressed satisfaction with the way they were taught. Students indicated that some of the things they particularly liked about their classes included: repetition of content; homework; explanations given in Spanish; teacher encouragement to participate in class; and "teachers care about the students." All of the students indicated that they would like to continue taking classes or pursue some kind of education. Most expressed interest in occupational education and English classes.

Based solely on the participants' affective responses to their classes, the amnesty program would be pronounced "effective." However, this particular population of students has a definite positive response set that must be taken into consideration when interpreting their interviews. The students would be unlikely to express any valid criticisms they might have about the program, making it more difficult for evaluators to identify areas of needed improvement. Although participants' opinions are a valuable component of any program evaluation, in this situation they should be interpreted with special caution.

Classroom Observations. Of the 17 classrooms observed, 11 were at the pre-literacy or beginning levels of instruction. The average number of students enrolled in these classes was 19, while the average number of students actually present was 14. The average scheduled class length was 2.3 hours, while the actual length of instructional time observed was 2.6 hours.

Seventy-six percent the classrooms had comfortable noise levels and temperatures , and 88% had both classroom size and classroom furniture appropriate for adults. One classroom observed had distracting announcements or interruptions. Observers indicated the presence of children in the classroom as the source of the distractions.

When observing instructional strategies used by the teachers, it was found that 29% of those observed did not use any direct introduction to the day's lesson. Only 47% of the teachers observed used events or items from the students' backgrounds or interests to explain or introduce new materials. However, 59% of

the teachers took advantage of spontaneous instructional opportunities as they arose.

The instructional methodologies most frequently used by teachers included whole class lecture (70%), chalkboard activity - oral drill (70%), and group work (47%). Only 23% of the teachers observed used peer-tutoring as an instructional methodology with these adult learners

CONCLUDING COMMENT: It should be noted that the preceding duscussion about the structure of the amnesty program is not entirely meant as a criticism. The program was designed to meet very specific needs of a large and diverse population while operating under severe time resturctions. More importantly, ". . . the amnesty program is primarily a legalization rather than an education effort." (Legalization White Paper, 1989) This means that the priority of the amnesty program is helping people adjust their legal status so they will no longer be in danger of deportation; any English of U.S. civics they learn in the process is more or less "icing on the cake."

Finally, the amnesty program has a finite lifespan which prevents major "fine tuning" of its educational components - the program will cease to exist before substantive changes can be made. Consequently, improvements from an evaluation standpoint, while perhaps desireable,are unlikely to be practical.

REFERENCES

Legalization: Phase two requirements and guidelines for courses of study recognized by the Attorney General. (1988). Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice.

Legalization white paper. (1989). Washington, D.C.: National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials.